

Afghan surge worries Obey

By Nick Paulson • For the Wausau Daily Herald • October 13, 2009

STEVENS POINT, WI -- U.S. Rep. Dave Obey voiced serious concerns Monday about plans to step up the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan.

Speaking to the Wisconsin Towns Association at its state convention in Stevens Point, Obey, D-Wausau, questioned whether the American people would support an increase in troop levels and costs that would accompany the buildup, as well as the ability of the Afghan and Pakistani governments to successfully aid the United States in the fight.

"I think we have to ask ourselves not just what foreign policy would make the most sense, but what foreign policy do we have the capacity to deliver," the 7th District representative said. "When you have to work through two weak reeds like the Pakistan government and Afghan government, it severely limits what you can accomplish."

President Barack Obama is reviewing U.S. policy in Afghanistan and has hosted several meetings with top military commanders, Cabinet officers and members of Congress to discuss strategy. Army Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, the commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, recently submitted to Obama a request for as many as 40,000 more service men and women in Afghanistan. About 68,000 are there now. McChrystal also has recommended a 10-year counter-insurgency strategy, but Obey said that approach would work only with strong national governments in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

President Hamid Karzai won reelection in Afghanistan in August, but many have disputed the legitimacy of the election.

Other options being discussed in Washington include expanding training for the Afghan army and focusing more on combating al-Qaida than the Taliban.

In a statement issued last week, Obey called a counter-insurgency effort "futile" without effective governments in the region, and his remarks Monday seemed to put him in line with those calling for a change in strategy that wouldn't increase troop levels.

"The Taliban is a god-awful operation. But if we're looking at our own national interests, our interest is in hemming in al-Qaida," Obey said. "If we're going to try and take on the Taliban all across Afghanistan, it's going to require hundreds of thousands of American, Pakistani and Afghani troops, and I just don't believe that this country wants to see that happen."

Obey leads the House Appropriations Committee, which would be responsible for writing spending legislation to pay for the increase. The additional troops and 10-year commitment would cost more than \$800 billion, Obey said.

At a time when the country is dealing with the worst recession in decades and Congress is working on health care reform that Obama has limited to \$900 billion over 10 years, the prospect of spending so much on Afghanistan worries Obey.

“In my view, if we do expand our effort in Afghanistan for that length of time, we will essentially devour every other national priority that anybody has,” he said.

Original story is located [here](#) .